

If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there shall Thy hand lead me, and Thy right hand shall hold me.—Psalm cxxxix: 9, 10.

CHAPTER XV.

The drifting smoke was still so dense that not even the floor of the valley could be discerned. Jenks dared not leave Iris at such a moment. He feared to bring her down the ladder lest another shell might be fired. But something must be done to end their suspense.

He called to Mir Jan: "Take off your turban and hold it above your head, if you think they can see you from the warship." "It is all right, sahib," came the cheering answer. "One boat is close in shore. I think, from the uniforms, they are English sailors, such as I have seen at Garden Reach. The Dyaks have all gone."

Nevertheless Jenks waited. There was nothing to gain by being too precipitate. A false step now might undo the achievements of many weeks.

Mir Jan was dancing about beneath in a state of wild excitement. "They have seen the Dyaks running to their sampans, sahib," he yelled, "and the second boat is being pulled in that direction. Yet another has just left the ship."

A translation made Iris excited, eager to go down and see these wonders. "Better wait here, dearest," he said. "The enemy may be driven back in this direction, and I cannot expose you to further risk. The sailors will soon land, and you can then descend in perfect safety."

The boom of a cannon came from the sea. Instinctively, the girl ducked for safety, though her companion smiled at her fears, for the shell would have long preceded the report, had it traveled their way.

"One of the remaining sampans has got under way," he explained, "and the warship is firing at it." "Two more guns were fired. The man-o'-war evidently meant business. "Poor wretches!" murmured Iris. "Cannot the survivors be allowed to escape?"

"Well, we are unable to interfere. Those caught on the island will probably be taken to the mainland and hanged for their crimes, so the manner of their end is not of much consequence."

To the girl's manifest relief there was no more firing, and Mir Jan announced that a number of sailors were actually on shore. Then her thoughts turned to a matter of concern to the feminine mind even in the gravest moments of existence. She loved her face with water and sought the discarded skin.

Soon the steady tramp of boot-clad feet advancing at the double was heard on the shingle, and an officer's voice, speaking the crude Hindustani of the engine room and forecastle, shouted to Mir Jan:

"Hi, you black fellow! Are there any white people here?" Jenks sang out: "Yes, two of us! Perched on the rock over your heads. We are coming down."

He cast loose the rope ladder. Iris was limp and trembling. "Steady, sweetheart," he whispered. "Don't forget the slip between the cup and the lip. Hold tight! But have no fear! I will be just behind you."

It was well he took this precaution. She was now so unsteady that an unguarded movement might have led to an accident. But the knowledge that her lover was near, the touch of his hand guiding her feet on the rungs of the ladder, sustained her. They had almost reached the level when a loud exclamation and the crash of a heavy blow caused Jenks to halt and look downward.

A Dyak lying at the foot of one of the scaling ladders, and severely wounded by a shell splinter, witnessed their descent. In his left hand he grasped a parang; his right arm was bandaged. Though unable to rise, the vengeful pirate mustered his remaining strength to crawl toward the scaling ladder. It was Taung S'All, inspired with the hate and venom of the dying snake. Even yet he hoped to deal a mortal stroke at the man who had defied him and all his cut-throat band.

He might have succeeded, as Jenks was so taken up with Iris, were it not for the watchful eyes of Mir Jan. The Mahomedan sprang at him with an oath, and gave him such a murderous whack with the butt of a rifle that the Dyak chief collapsed and breathed out his fierce spirit in a groan.

At the first glance Jenks did not recognize Taung S'All, owing to his change of costume. Through the thinner smoke he could see several sailors running up.

"Look out, there!" he cried. "There is a lady here. If any Dyak moves, knock him on the head!"

But, with the passing of the chief, their instant they were standing on the firm ground, and a British naval lieutenant was saying eagerly:

"We seem to have turned up in the nick of time. Do you, by any chance, belong to the Sirdar?" "We are the sole survivors," answered the sailor.

"You two only?" "Yes. She struck on the northwest reef of this island during a typhoon. This lady, Mir Jan's daughter, and I were flung ashore."

"Miss Deane! Can it be possible? Let me congratulate you most heartily. Sir Arthur Deane is on board the Orient at this moment."

"The Orient?" "Yes, the Orient. The uniforms, the pleasant faces of the English sailors, the strange sensation of hearing familiar words in tones other than those of the man she loved, bewildered her."

"Yes," explained the officer, with a sympathetic smile. "That's our ship, you know, in the offing there."

It was all too wonderful to be quite understood yet. She turned to Robert: "Do you hear? They say my father is not far away. Take me to him."

"No need for that, miss," interrupted a warrant officer. "Here he is coming ashore. He wanted to come with us, but the captain would not permit it, as there seemed to be some trouble ahead."

Sure enough, even the girl's swimming eyes could distinguish the gray-bearded civilian seated beside an officer in the stern-sheets of a small gig now threading a path through the broken reef beyond Turtle beach. In five minutes, father and daughter would meet.

Meanwhile the officer, intent on duty, addressed Jenks again: "May I ask you who you are?" "My name is Anstruther—Robert Anstruther."

Iris, clinging to his arm, heard the reply. So he had abandoned all pretense. He was ready to face the world at her side. She stole a loving glance at him as she cried: "Yes, Captain Anstruther of the Indian Staff corps. If he will not tell you all that he has done, how he has saved

my life twenty times, how he has fought single-handed against eighty men, ask me!"

The guild officer did not need to look a second time at Iris' face to lengthen the list of Captain Anstruther's achievements, by one more item. He sighed. A good sailor always does sigh when a particularly pretty girl is laboring under a great deal of love."

"But he could be very polite. "Captain Anstruther does not appear to have left much for us to do, Miss Deane," he said. "Indeed," turning to the girl, "in which way in which my men will be useful?"

"I would recommend that they drag the green stuff off that fire and stop the smoke. Then, a detachment should go round the north side of the island and the remaining Dyaks into the hands of the party you have landed, as I understand, at the further end of the south beach. Mr Jan, the Mahomedan here, who has been a most faithful ally during part of our siege, will accompany them."

The other man cast a comprehensive glance over the rock, with its scaling ladders and dangling rope ladder, the cave, the little groups of dead or unconscious pirates—for every wounded man who could move a limb had crawled away after the first shell burst—and drew a deep breath.

"How long have you been up there?" he asked. "Over thirty hours."

"It was a great fight?" "Somewhat worse than that looks," said Anstruther. "This is only the end of it. Altogether, we have accounted for nearly two score of the poor devils."

"Do you think you can make them prisoners, without killing any more of them?" asked Iris. "That depends entirely on themselves, Miss Deane. My men will not fire a shot unless they encounter resistance."

Robert looked toward the approaching boat. She would not land yet for a couple of minutes. "By the way," he said, "will you tell me your name?"

"Playdon—Lieutenant Philip H. Playdon."

"Do you know to what nation this island belongs?" "It is no-man's land, I think. It is marked 'uninhabited' on the chart."

"Then," said Anstruther, "I call upon you, Lieutenant Playdon, and all others here present, to witness that I, Robert Anstruther, late of the Indian army, acting on behalf of myself and Miss Iris Deane, declare that we have taken possession of this island in the name of his Britannic majesty the king of England, that we are the joint occupiers and owners thereof, and claim all property rights vested therein."

These formal phrases, coming at such a moment, amazed his hearers. Iris alone had an inkling of the underlying motive.

"I don't suppose anyone will dispute your title," said the naval officer, gravely. He unquestionably imagined that suffering and exposure had slightly disturbed the other man's senses, yet he had seldom seen any person who looked to be in more complete possession of his faculties.

"Thank you," replied Robert, with equal composure, though he felt inclined to laugh at Playdon's mystification. "I only wished to secure a sufficient number of witnesses for a verbal declaration. When I have a few minutes to spare I will affix a legal notice on the wall in front of our cave."

Playdon bowed silently. There was something in the speaker's manner that puzzled him. He detailed a small guard to accompany Robert and Iris, who now walked toward the beach, and asked Mir Jan to pilot him as suggested by Anstruther.

The boat was yet many yards from shore when Iris ran forward and stretched out her arms to the man who was staring at her with wistful despair.

"Father! Father!" she cried. "Don't you know me?"

Sir Arthur Deane was looking at the two strange figures on the sands, and each moment his heart sank lower. This island held his final hope. During many weary weeks, since the day when a kindly admiral placed the cruiser Orient at his disposal, he had scoured the China sea, the coasts of Borneo and Java, for some tidings of the ill-fated Sirdar.

He met naught save blank nothingness, the silence of the great ocean mausoleum. Not a boat, a spar, a life-buoy, was cast up by the waves to yield faintest trace of the lost steamer. Every naval man knew what had happened. The vessel had met with some mishap to her machinery, struck a derelict, or turned turtle, during that memorable typhoon of March 17 and 18. She had gone down with all hands. Her fate was a foregone conclusion.

No ship's boat could live in that sea, even if the crew were able to launch one. It was another of ocean's tragedies, with the fifth act left to the imagination.

To examine every sand patch and tree-covered shoal in the China sea was an impossible task. The great ocean could do was to visit the principal islands and institute inquiries among the fishermen and small traders. At last, the previous night, a Malay, tempted by hope of reward, boarded the vessel when lying at anchor off the large island and away to the south, and told the captain a wondrous tale of a devil-haunted place inhabited by two white spirits, a male and a female, whither a local pirate named Taung S'All had gone by chance with his men and suffered great loss. But Taung S'All was bewitched by the female spirit, and had returned there, with a great force, swearing to capture her or perish. The spirits, the Malay said, had dwelt upon the island for many years. His father and grandfather knew the place and feared it. Taung S'All would never be seen again.

This queer yarn was the first indication they received of the whereabouts of any persons who might possibly be shipwrecked Europeans, though not survivors from the Sirdar. Anyhow, the tiny dot lay in the water's edge, easily acknowledged as a hallucination when Iris' tremendous accents reached his ears.

"Father, father! Don't you know me?"

He stood up, amazed and trembling. "Yes, dear father. It is I, your own little girl given back to you. Oh dear! Oh dear! I cannot see you for my tears."

They had some difficulty to keep him in the boat, and the man pulling stroke smashed a stout oar with the next wrench.

And so they met at last, and the sailors left them alone, to crowd round Anstruther and ply him with a hundred questions. Although he fell in with their humor, and gradually pieced together the stirring story which was supplemented each instant by the arrival of disconsolate Dyaks and the comments of the men who returned from cave and beach, his soul was filled with the sight of Iris and her father, and the happy, inconsequent demands with which each sought to ascertain and relieve the extent of the other's anxiety.

Then Iris called to him: "Robert, I want you."

The use of his Christian name created something akin to a sensation. Sir Arthur Deane was startled, even in his immeasurable delight at finding his child unharmed—the picture of rude health and happiness.

Anstruther advanced. "This is my father," she cried, shrill with joy. "And father darling, this is Captain Anstruther, to whom alone, under God's will, I owe my life. Many times since the moment the Sirdar was lost."

It was no time for questioning. Sir Arthur Deane took off his hat and held it to his hand.

"Captain Anstruther," he said, "as I owe you my daughter's life, I owe you that which I can never repay. And I owe you my own life, too, for I could not have survived the knowledge that my child was in danger."

Robert took the proffered hand— "I think, Sir Arthur, that, of the two, I am the more deeply indebted. There are some privileges whose value cannot be measured, and among them the privilege of restoring your daughter to your arms takes the highest place."

"Then, being much more self-possessed than the older man, who was naturally in a state of agitation that was almost painful, he turned to Iris: "I think," he said, "that your father should take you on board the Orient. There you may, perhaps, find some suitable clothing, eat something, and recover from the exciting events of the morning. Afterwards, you must bring Sir Arthur ashore again, and we will guide him over the island. I am sure you will find much to tell him meanwhile."

The baronet could not fail to note the manner in which these two addressed each other, the fearless love which leaped from eye to eye, the calm acceptance of a relationship not to be questioned or grieved. Robert and Iris, without spoken word on the subject, had tacitly agreed to avoid the slightest semblance of subterfuge as to their love, yet what could Sir Arthur Deane do? To frame a suitable protest at such a moment was not to be dreamed of. As yet he was too shaken to collect his thoughts. Anstruther's proposal, however, helped him to blunt out what he intuitively felt to be a disagreeable fact. Yet something must be said for his brain reeled.

"Your suggestion is admirable," he cried, striving desperately to affect a calm of complaisance. "The ship's stores may provide Iris with some sort of rig-out, and an old friend of hers is on board at this moment. Little expecting her presence, Lord Ventnor has accompanied me in my search. He will, of course, be delighted to ratify in Anstruther flushed a deep bronze, but Iris broke in—

"Father, why did he come with you?" "Sir Arthur, driven into this sudden squall of explanation, became dignified. "Well, you see, my dear, under the circumstances, he felt an anxiety to commiserate with my own."

"But why, why?" "Iris was quite calm. With Robert near, she was courageous. Even the perturbed baronet experienced a new sensation as his troubled glance fell before her searching eyes. His daughter had left him a joyous, heedless girl. He found her a woman, strong, self-reliant, purposeful. Yet he kept on, choosing the most straightforward means as the only honorable way of clearing a course so beset with unsuspected obstacles."

"It is only reasonable, Iris, that your affianced husband should suffer an agony of apprehension on your account, and do all that was possible to effect your rescue."

"My affianced husband?" "Well, my dear girl, perhaps that is hardly the correct phrase from your point of view. Yet you cannot fail to remember that Lord Ventnor—"

"Father, dear," said Iris solemnly, but in a voice free from all uncertainty, "my affianced husband stands here! We pledged our troth at the presence of God, and has been blessed by him. I have made no compact with Lord Ventnor. He is a base and unworthy man. Did you but know truth concerning him you would not mention his name in the same breath with mine. Would he, Robert?"

Never was man so perplexed as the unfortunate shipowner. In the instant that his beloved daughter was restored to him out of the very depths of the sea, he was asked either to undertake the role of a disappointed and unforgiving parent, or sanction her marriage to a truculent-looking person of most forbidding if otherwise manly appearance, who had certainly saved her from death in ways not presently clear to him, but who could not be regarded as a suitable son-in-law solely on that account.

What could he do, what could he say, to make the position less intolerable? Anstruther, quicker than Iris to appreciate Sir Arthur Deane's dilemma, gallantly helped him. He placed a loving hand on the girl's shoulder.

"Be advised by me, Sir Arthur, and you, too, Iris," he said. "This is no hour for such explanations. Leave me to deal with Lord Ventnor. I am content to trust the ultimate verdict to you, Sir Arthur. You will learn in due course all that has happened. Go on board, Iris. Meet Lord Ventnor as you would meet any other friend. You will not marry him, I know. I can trust you." He said this with a smile that

robbed the words of serious purport. "Believe me, you can find plenty to occupy your minds today without troubling yourselves about Lord Ventnor."

"I am very much obliged to you," murmured the baronet, who, notwithstanding his worry, was far too experienced a man of the world not to acknowledge the good sense of this advice, no matter how ruffianly might be the guile of the strange person who gave it.

"That is settled, then," said Robert, laughing good-naturedly, for he well knew what a weird spectacle he must present to the bewildered old gentleman.

Even Sir Arthur Deane was fascinated by the ragged and hairy giant who carried himself so masterfully and held everybody over the stile at the right moment. He tried to develop the change in the conversation.

"By the way," he said, "how came you to be on the Sirdar? I have a list of all the passengers and crew, and your name does not appear therein."

"Oh, that is easily accounted for. I shipped as a steward, in the name of Robert Jenks."

"Robert Jenks! A steward?" "This was worse than ever. The unhappy shipowner thought the sky must have fallen.

"Yes, that forms some part of the promised explanation."

Iris rapidly gathered the drift of her lover's wishes.

"Come, father," she cried, merrily. "I am aching to see what the ship's stores, which you and Robert pin your faith to, can do for me in the shape of garments. I have the utmost belief in the British navy, and even a skeptic should be convinced of its infallibility if H. M. S. Orient is able to provide a lady's outfit."

Sir Arthur Deane gladly availed himself of the proffered compromise. He assisted Iris into the boat, though that active young person was far better able to support him, and a word to the officer in command sent the gig flying back to the ship. Anstruther, during a momentary delay, made a small request on his own account. Lieutenant Playdon, nearly as big a man as Robert, dispatched a note to his servant, and the gig speedily returned with a complete assortment of clothing and linen. The man also brought a dressing case, with the result that a dip in the bath, and ten minutes in the hands of an expert valet, made Anstruther a new man.

Acting under his advice, the bodies of the dead were thrown into the lagoon, the wounded were collected in the but to be attended to by the ship's surgeon, and the prisoners were paraded in front of Mir Jan, who identified every man, and found by counting heads, that none was missing.

Robert did not forget to write out a formal notice and fasten it to the rock. This proceeding further mystified the officers of the Orient, who had gradually formed a connected idea of the great fight made by the shipwrecked pair, though Anstruther squirmed inwardly when he thought of the manner in which Iris would picture the scene. As it was, he had the first innings, and he did not fail to use the opportunity. In the few terse words which the militant

Briton best understands, he described the girl's fortitude, her unflinching cheerfulness, her uncomplaining readiness to do and dare.

Little was said by his auditors, save to interpolate an occasional question as to why such and such a thing was necessary, or how some particular drawback had been surmounted. Standing near the well, it was not necessary to move to explain to them the chief features of the island, and point out the measures he had adopted.

When he ended, the first lieutenant, who commanded the boats sent in pursuit of the flying Dyaks—the Orient sank both sampans as soon as they were launched—summed up the general verdict:

"You do not need our admiration, Captain Anstruther. Each man of us envies you from the bottom of his soul."

"I do, I know—from the very bilge," exclaimed a stout midshipman, one of those who had seen Iris.

Robert waited until the laugh died away. "There is an error about my rank,"

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BY LOUIS TRACY.

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